



TOWN OF WINCHESTER – CITY OF WINSTED

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26 February 2009

Raised Bill 6194

“An Act Concerning Additional Workers’ Compensation Presumptions for Firefighters, Police Officers, and Emergency Rescue Workers”

Good afternoon Senator Prague, Representative Ryan and members of the Labor & Public Employees Committee.

I am Keith J. Robbins, Town Manager of Winchester, Past President of CCM, and I am here to speak in opposition to RB 6194, proposed changes to the Workers Compensation Statutes pertaining to Firefighters, Police Officers and EMS Providers. In particular, the addition of various presumptions to the Bill. Raised Bill 6194 is an unprecedented, unjustified and unfunded state mandate that would dramatically expand the workers’ compensation benefits system for public safety employees at extreme detriment to the state’s cities and towns.

Similar legislation was proposed last year and was defeated, albeit after a very difficult process to defeat this extremely harmful legislation to cities’ and towns’ fiscal health. This legislation would add new and extremely costly special workers’ compensation benefits for certain employees.

The proposal includes a provision for mandated compensation for cancers: multiple myeloma, non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, prostate, and testicular; and mandates compensation for the following infectious and contagious diseases: hepatitis, meningitis and tuberculosis. How can it be assumed these illnesses are directly related to job activities? The existing workers’ compensation system is fair and the appropriate mechanism to address such claims is already in place.

By enacting legislation with the phrase “a rebuttable presumption”, this legislation makes it virtually impossible to disprove the claim or claims. I have no idea where I would find the dollars to fund any new claims; I am currently funding \$332,605 for Heart and Hypertension benefits annually. That equates to approximately 1/3 of a mill to the Town of Winchester. Those claims are left over from the last fiasco of legislation.

The enacting of this proposal is completely unnecessary and not needed (although some in this building disagree). All public safety employees are currently covered by existing regulations. The public safety sector is one of the most record intensive service areas. If an incident occurs that may result in a claim being put forward by an employee, it is documented in triplicate and then some.

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There is no need to add an extra step to insure that cities and towns have to pay out without recourse. Nobody disputes the work that public safety employees do and do well for which they are compensated very well for. This provision is simply unnecessary and foolish, to be kind. I watched the floor discussion the last time this legislation was proposed and the emotion of it all was simply not needed. The issue is black and white.

The coverage exists and the need to expand it does not exist. I am all too aware of the fiscal situation we put ourselves in; I had hoped we would not exacerbate the situation with more **EXTREMELY COSTLY MANDATES!**

Connecticut's towns and cities are facing economic crises not seen in at least a generation. **From East Hartford to Greenwich – no hometown is immune to the recession – and local officials have already taken drastic measures to address this crisis:**

- East Hartford has laid-off eight employees, and eliminated a total of 20 positions on the town side (which is a 4% staff reduction) this fiscal year. Their Board of Education has a reduction plan to shrink its workforce 4% during the next fiscal year, which translates to 45 positions.
- New Haven faces the very real likelihood of eliminating 244 positions, and 166 employees by tomorrow.
- Bridgeport has already eliminated 225 positions.
- Greenwich has already laid-off 40 employees.

From layoffs – to accessing reserve accounts – to eliminating library, transfer station, and community center hours – local officials are in the trenches when it comes to making tough decisions in these difficult economic times.

And, with this backdrop of fiscal peril – you have before you – a huge, costly and unnecessary state mandate like HB 6194.

Again, if there is a nexus between the illness and the job – the current workers' compensation system provides coverage. CCM urges you to **oppose Raised Bill 6194**, now – in committee. This proposal to increase municipal costs as local leaders across the state struggle with layoff decisions – should not be acted upon.

I again am offering my services to stand with any member of this body who votes to defeat this costly unnecessary mandate and repeal any other mandate we can't afford.

Once and for all, defeat this aberration of legislation. Thank you for your time and subject to your questions.

Keith J. Robbins